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1 As the first full-length study of Sergey Prokofiev's film scores, Kevin Bartig's *Composing for the Red Screen* fills a critical gap in the literature on this Soviet composer. Indeed, the book ranks – along with Simon Morrison's recent chronicle of Prokofiev's Soviet years[1] – as one of the major contributions to our understanding of Prokofiev's circumstances and style from the late 1920s onward. This is largely because the cinema presented Prokofiev with a timely opportunity to apply his so-called "new simplicity," a self-conscious turn in his style after he had decided around 1930 that "what is needed now is to create for the masses in a manner that allows the music to remain good."[2] Bartig takes up this idea as a central thread of the book, arguing ultimately that "the mass-music challenge that faced Prokofiev in 1930 governed his subsequent work on film, and the chapters of this book reconstruct how he met that challenge anew with each project he tackled" (p. 7).

2 Proceeding more or less chronologically through Prokofiev's eight completed film scores (a useful table on p. 4 lists them all), Bartig discusses not only the music and its function in each film, but, relying on impressive and wide-ranging archival work, he also charts the history of Prokofiev's participation in each production, the bureaucratic hoops through which directors and scriptwriters (and thus composers) had to jump to get films made in the Soviet Union, and Prokofiev's relationships with the various directors with whom he worked. This is another central contribution of the book, a feature that Bartig is correct to highlight: Prokofiev's "experience with Soviet film also

sheds light on procedural matters, namely, commissioning, studio review processes, and day-to-day work in a Soviet film studio, all concerns that have yet to receive significant attention from scholars" (p. 10).

3 Because his approach is largely chronological, Bartig does not explicitly categorize the films based on, say, musical style or approach to scoring, or the circumstances of the composer's involvement in each project. Nevertheless, Bartig's treatment of the films can be divided into three groups: early experimentation (Chapters 1 and 2), work with Sergey Eisenstein (Chapters 3, 4, and 6), and wartime films (Chapter 5).

4 The chapters on the early film scores – both of which consist largely of previously published material – are particularly useful for their discussions of Prokofiev's music for *Lieutenant Kizhe* (1934) and *The Queen of Spades* (1936-38) *as film music*, given that the former is known mostly from the concert suite Prokofiev assembled after the fact and the latter was written for a film that was, in the end, never actually made. Part of the neglect for *Lieutenant Kizhe* as a film has to do with what in the end was a curious relationship between music and images, a result of the fact that "composing and filming occurred simultaneously but independently, in separate corners of Europe. Prokofiev composed the entire score for images he had not yet seen, relying solely on verbal descriptions of the scenes in questions and, in a few instances, the timings of those scenes" (p. 21). This was an atypical arrangement, to be sure, but it nevertheless speaks to a lack of standardized practices in early Soviet sound film production. Prokofiev's score thus had to be flexible and adaptable, and therefore could not be highly specific to the images. Furthermore, the film's director extended and expanded cues without Prokofiev's approval and shifted other cues in order to match later revisions of the script. The result was a perhaps unintentionally modernistic audiovisual relationship, but one that "enriched the film's surrealistic atmosphere" (p. 33). Regardless of how poorly it matched with the images, Prokofiev's music for *Kizhe* bears the trademarks of his new mass style: lyricism, simplicity, and repetition (for the sake of memorability). The score's long afterlife speaks to Prokofiev's success in this endeavor.[3]

5 The case of *The Queen of Spades* further evinces the peculiarities of filmmaking in the Soviet 1930s, where competing ideological interests, changing bureaucratic structures, and endless evaluation of scripts often overshadowed the actual production of films. Like with *Kizhe*, Prokofiev worked not from a finished version of the film, but from a script that did not contain any indications of timings or musical cues. On the one hand, this allowed him a great deal of compositional freedom, but, on the other, it again meant that he had little control over the audio-visual coordination. Prokofiev eventually delivered a complete score, but by this time production on the film had halted, was restarted, but then delayed again, and finally, with the creation of the Committee on Cinema Affairs in 1938, it was scrapped completely.[4] Working from the same script Prokofiev did, as well as a few early production sketches, Bartig nevertheless demonstrates compellingly how Prokofiev's score for the film took on Chaikovsky's imposing (but, according to Soviet standards, ideologically-flawed) interpretation of the Pushkin classic by undermining its thematic integration and romanticism through dehumanization, parody, and dysfunction (the words are Bartig's). Prokofiev's music for *The Queen of Spades* is, Bartig writes, ultimately "a rejoinder to Chaikovsky's" (p. 50), but as in the *Kizhe* score, it consists of a mixture of lyricism, simple textures, short repeated melodic cells, and ostinatos – all marks of the

"new simplicity." The scores for *Kizhe* and *The Queen of Spades* are thus examples both of how Soviet film and film music were still very much in an infant state through the mid-1930s, at least in terms of production methods, and of how bureaucratic matters could quickly derail productions.

6 Prokofiev's relationship to the classics of nineteenth-century Russian music was not always as contentious as it was in his work on *The Queen of Spades*, as Bartig argues convincingly in the chapters on Prokofiev's work with Eisenstein. Indeed, the greatest strength of these chapters is Bartig's demythologizing of the Eisenstein-Prokofiev collaboration, a relationship that has suffered from years of misinformation and overreliance on Eisenstein's *ex past facto* theoretical analyses.[5] The results of this approach have threatened to decontextualize films that are very much reflections of the period in which they were made. Bartig, in fact, devotes an entire chapter (the third) to establishing Prokofiev's Hollywood *bona fides*, which greatly affected his conception of the music for *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), especially how to record and mix it. In the same chapter Bartig also shows that the partnership between Eisenstein and Prokofiev had not been long in the making: Eisenstein had in fact first approached Gavril Popov to score *Nevsky*, and had even lobbied on his behalf after the composer had, in the fallout from the *Lady Macbeth* affair, been banned from the Mosfilm (the Moscow film studio). The chapter concludes with a clarification of Eisenstein and Prokofiev's working methods, a topic that has been the subject of much romanticizing in past scholarship. With these facts in place, Bartig argues in Chapter 4 that while Eisenstein's "tableau-like constructions of scenes" (p. 79) made for a particularly unique visual style, the turn to the deep Russian past for subject matter to use as commentary on contemporary politics falls very much in line with the typical propaganda of later 1930s Soviet socialist realist biopics. Prokofiev's score, moreover, mimics the "old" subject matter and "epic" quality of the image track by relying on juxtaposition of thematic blocks, by imagining an "assumed vernacular" (a term Bartig borrows from Mark Slobin) of ancient Russian folk music and quasi-Catholic liturgical music, and by referencing the style and sounds of the nineteenth-century *kuchkists*, most notably Borodin, Balakirev, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Thus, rather than springing from some abstract ahistorical font, Bartig demonstrates that the film and its music are directly linked to both contemporary politics and established traditions. The resulting analysis thus very successfully achieves Bartig's stated mission to "examine Prokofiev's music [for *Nevsky*] as a product of its time and place" (73).

7 Many of the practices from *Nevsky* carried over to *Ivan the Terrible* (Part I, 1944; Part II, 1945), though Bartig points out that the film's genesis and final form – insofar as we can call it complete, for a planned third part was never realized – left a complex and multivalent narrative that "relies on intellectually demanding patterns of imagery" (133) against which the musical accompaniment sometimes grates, at least in terms of its referential consistency. As with the analysis of *Nevsky*, Bartig painstakingly charts Prokofiev's reliance on nineteenth-century Russian models, noting that "appropriations and references in the *Ivan* score are far more specific than those in *Nevsky*, drawing heavily from Rimsky-Korsakov in particular. The *Ivan* score evinces Prokofiev's desire to merge with the Russian national tradition, not simply mine it for semiotically rich musical markers" (134). The effort is illuminating, particularly the discussion of how Prokofiev uses nineteenth-century tropes of exoticism to characterize Ivan's villainous enemies, though some of Bartig's language here – "exotic-sounding," "eastern-sounding" (both p. 139) – is clunky. In the end, Bartig's

sober approach to Prokofiev's music for *Ivan* and *Nevsky* lets us appreciate both films from a newly contextualized and functional angle.

8 Bartig devotes only a single chapter to Prokofiev's four wartime film scores: *Tonya* (1942), *Kotovsky* (1942), *Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppe* (1942), and *Lermontov* (1943). This has to do with the fact that none "was a major project for Prokofiev," they were "among the most straightforwardly Socialist Realist subjects he tackled in any genre" (both quotes p. 106), the films "faded once they had served their immediate purpose" (p. 130), and only the manuscript for *Tonya* survives fully intact.[6] But Bartig also makes the point that film work in this period was rather profitable: it attracted many composers who had been evacuated to Alma-Ata or other far-off locales during the war where making a living suddenly became more difficult. The hard-up Prokofiev, who had recently left his sons and wife Lina for Mira Mendelson, and thus had to support two households, admitted as much in a letter to his friend the composer Nikolay Myaskovsky: "film work is plenty, lucrative, and does not demand artistic over-exertion. Alma-Ata is a pleasant city full of money" (p. 110). The apparent comfort implied by these words, though, was undermined by the realities of making movies in temporary studios, under strict guidelines, and with limited resources. In the case of *Lermontov*, for example, Prokofiev again had to work with the director by correspondence, which soon became so overbearing that Prokofiev divorced himself from the project having completed only two brief dance numbers (the score was eventually completed by Venedikt Pushkov). Even in the films where work was able to proceed more smoothly, Prokofiev's music was in many ways "neither innovative nor uncommon" (p. 122). He relied in these scores on a mixture of recycled music, traditional musical stereotypes to depict heroes and villains, and conventional treatment of leitmotifs, often derived from "theme" or title songs, a genre to which Prokofiev, in Bartig's formulation, was normally "allergic" (p. 122), but which under the circumstances was the most expedient in serving the goals of the film, and thus in ensuring a paycheck. Bartig aptly summarizes Prokofiev's wartime film scores by citing an alleged quip by the composer in reference to his work on *Lermontov*: "not too bad, but not too good" (p. 115). Whatever the quality of these films and their scores, though, their patriotic subject matter and the context in which they were made forced Prokofiev to further hone his new simple, direct, and evocative style. Though these are not films or scores likely to soon receive widespread rehabilitation, Bartig's discussion of them is valuable for highlighting the struggles and strictures that faced Soviet composers (of all types) during the war.

9 In the end, Bartig has given us a masterfully researched and written account of Prokofiev's life in film, from his first tastes in Hollywood to the changing production circumstances throughout his Soviet years. If at times one might wish for a broader contextualization of Prokofiev's film scores within the wider practices of Soviet film music – the early films and the work with Eisenstein are, for example, in many ways exceptions to the rule – this is easily outweighed by Bartig's achievement in clarifying misunderstandings, bringing lesser or unknown works to light, and highlighting the role that Prokofiev's film music played in the development of his "new simplicity."

10 Occasional misspellings (e.g., Guiness vs. Guinness [p. 34], distain vs. disdain [p. 37], Mogol vs. Mongol [p. 174]), errors or inconsistencies in proper name transliterations (e.g., Rubenstein instead of Rubinstein [twice in the table on p. 138], Mikhailovich [p. 174] vs. Mikhaílovich [p. 175], Goldenweiser [p. 102] vs. Goldenveyzer [p. 161]) and close

repetitions of more rarely used words (e.g., proffer [pp. 37 and 44], bowdlerize [twice on p. 118], preternatural [pp. 121 and 125]) do not mar what is otherwise a finely edited book. Bartig's prose, furthermore, is admirably crisp, clean, and clear. He is particularly apt at imaginatively rendering in words the sound of Prokofiev's music: "The persistent rat-a-tatting … at times imbues the period setting with bellicose splendor, at others time renders it surreal" (p. 29, describing the omnipresent snare drum in the *Lieutenant Kizhe* score) or "The remainder of the number derives from this initial melodic material while quicksilver movements between unrelated tonal areas … evince a mercurial character" (p. 47, describing the "Overture" cue from *The Queen of Spades*). Carefully chosen musical examples, film stills, documentary photos, and an appendix featuring new translations of essays relating to Prokofiev's film music round out this excellent book.

NOTES

1. MORRISON, Simon, *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

2. From a diary entry 2-5 May 1933, quoted in *Ibid*., p. 14.

3. On this afterlife, see KUPFER, Peter, "Prokofiev in the Popular Consciousness," in *Rethinking Prokofiev*, edited by Rita McAllister and Christina Guillaumier, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

4. As was so often the case, Prokofiev did not abandon the score once the filming had been called off. Instead, he mined it for later uses. Passages from the *The Queen of Spades* score made their way into *War and Peace* (1943, rev. 1946-52), Piano Sonata No. 8 (1944), the Fifth Symphony (1944), and the *Pushkin Waltzes* (1949).

5. Most famously his expansive, but misguided analysis of the "vertical montage" in the "Daybreak" cue from *Alexander Nevsky*. See EISENSTEIN, Sergei M., The Film Sense, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1942, p, 156-216.

6. In addition, *Tonya*, while fully completed, was never released. Bartig's claim, however, that these films are all but inaccessible today is only partially true (p. 130). All of the films apart from *Tonya* are, for example, available for download at http://film.arjlover.net/film/ (accessed 29 February 2016).

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